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XIII. — *Sun Myths in Lithuanian Folksongs.*¹

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THE subject of Baltic mythology, and still more of Slavic mythology in general, is an unexplored jungle, — nay, it is a buried forest, and so deeply and hopelessly buried in the forgotten past that no Roentgen ray of comparative investigation is likely ever to penetrate to its hidden depths.

The most that has been written on the subject of Lithuanian mythology by the Germans as well as by the Poles is so permeated in branch and fibre by that which is fictitious and spurious as to be well-nigh worthless. I refer particularly to such works as Veckenstedt,² *Mythen, Sagen, und Legenden der Žamaiten*, and Narbutt,³ *Lithuanian Mythology*, about which a group of satellites are ranged, men who have endeavored to enhance the glory of their own neglected race at the expense of accuracy, or have unscrupulously sought a short cut to fame by their inventive shrewdness. Impartial investigators had hoped for new light from the publication of the vast body of popular songs that have long been current among the people, and for this hope there was some encouragement.

The first collection of Lithuanian folksongs, or *dainos*, ever published to the world, if we except three short songs which appeared in 1745, was made in 1825 by Rhesa. It contained 85 songs with a German translation. There were in this collection some five or six songs of mythological content, all referring to the sun, moon, or heavenly bodies. Rhesa's

¹ Read at the special meeting held at Philadelphia, December, 1900.

² Heidelberg, 1888, in two parts. The book has been widely circulated, but is apparently an invention from beginning to end. Compare the full criticism of it by A. Brückner, *Archiv f. slav. Phil.* IX, p. 14 ff.

³ *Mitologia litewska*. Wilna, 1835. It forms vol. I of his *Dzieje starożytnie narodu Litewskiego*.

collection proved the incentive to other collections. In 1853 Professor Nesselmann, of Königsberg, gathered into a single volume, with German metrical translation, all of the songs that were available to him from every source. They numbered 410. Since 1853 collections have been made by numerous scholars, foremost among whom we may mention Leskien and Brugmann,¹ Bezzenberger,² Kurschat,³ Kolberg,⁴ Bassanowicz,⁵ and the brothers Juskiewicz. By far the greatest numbers were collected by the last named, who published during the years 1880–83 four large volumes of dainos.⁶ From all these collections the number of folksongs now known is between 5000 and 6000, and yet in all this enormous mass of material, so far as I know, there is, outside of the few sun myths contained in the early collection of Rhesa, barely a reference here and there to the old mythology. Even in these, I am told by Professor Leskien, who has gathered many dainos from the lips of the Lithuanian peasantry, the mythological references are wholly unintelligible to the common people. Professor Kurschat, who was a native Lithuanian and who has probably published more in the Lithuanian language than any other person, if we include the weekly paper *Kelewis*, of which he was sole editor from 1849–1880 (*i.e.* during its whole existence), tells us⁷ that, of all the dainos which he had heard among the people, not one contained a reference to the old mythology, or to things or conceptions connected with the Christian religion. The point of this last statement will appear later.

But even the few mythological songs which we possess do not admit of full treatment at the present time. I wish

¹ A. Leskien u. K. Brugman, *Litauische Volkslieder u. Märchen*. Strassburg, 1882. Also by Leskien a small collection in vol. IV, *Archiv f. slav. Phil.*

² *Litauische Forschungen*. Göttingen, 1882.

³ In the appendix to his *Litauische Grammatik*, Halle, 1876, pp. 451–464.

⁴ *Pieśni ludu litewskiego*. Cracow, 1879.

⁵ *Oškabaliun dainos surinktos ir išdūtos per Jonan Basanavitun*. Tilsit, 1884.

⁶ *Liėtūviškos Dainos*. 3 vols. Kazan, 1880–1882. *Liėtūviškos Svotbėnės Dainos*. St. Petersburg, 1883. The actual collections were made by Anton Juskiewicz. He died in 1880, after which the task of publishing fell to his brother John.

⁷ *Litauische Grammatik*, p. 446.

simply to call attention to two or three points, especially along the line of the development of traditional literature, which, so far as I know, have not yet been properly dwelt upon.

Perhaps no Lithuanian folksong is more widely known among scholars than the one¹ which celebrates the marriage of the moon and the sun and their subsequent conjugal infelicity. I have attempted to make an English metrical translation of this and other dainos without doing too much violence to the spirit of the original; happy if I do not do violence to the poetic sense of my readers. The song runs as follows:—

The moon did wed the blushing sun,—
 In early springtime fell the day;
 The lovely sun arose betimes,
 The moon arose and slunk away;
 He wandered by himself afar,
 He flirted with the morning star.

The thunder god was greatly wroth,
 He cleft him with his sword in twain:
 “Why did you thus desert the sun,
 And wander in the night afar?
 Why flirted with the morning star?”
 His heart was filled with grief and pain.

The explanation of the mythology of this song is not far to seek. Perkúnas, the thunder god, the deus κατ' ἐξοχήν of the old mythology, is still the mightiest and most terrible divinity of the heavens. In Schleicher's and Kurschat's time Perkúnas meant simply *thunder*, although reminiscences of his divinity still remained in such expressions for thundering as, Perkúnas grjáuja,² the thunder (or Perkúns) smites, dēvs bāria,³ the god scolds. The wedding in the early spring is the time of the new moon when sun and moon set and rise together. The separation in the morning is caused by the

¹ Rhesa, No. 27. Nesselmann, No. 2. Schleicher, No. 1.

² Nesselmann, *Lit. Wörterbuch*, under *Perkúnas*.

³ Schleicher, *Sitzungsberichte der philos.-histor. Classe der Kais. Akademie der Wissenschaften*, IX, Oct. 1852, p. 549.

sun's rising earlier and earlier each day, while the moon lingers behind as he approaches the full. The vengeance of Perkúnas comes with his waning in the third quarter.

In the year following the appearance of this song with Rhesa's German translation, Heine published his "Sonnenuntergang," in the *Nordsee* collection, which, if not suggested directly by the Lithuanian song, bears at least a close resemblance to it. Heine follows the Latin genders and makes the moon the bride. Compare the following lines:—

Einst am Himmel glänzten,
Ehlich vereint,
Luna, die Göttin, und Sol, der Gott,
Und es wimmelten um sie her die Sterne,
Die kleinen, unschuldigen Kinder.
Doch böse Zungen zischelten Zwiespalt,
Und es trennte sich feindlich
Das hohe, leuchtende Ehepaar.

In other dāinos of Rhesa's collection it is easy to understand that the stars are represented as the children of the sun.¹ Of course the idea is not exclusively Lithuanian. Mannhardt² quotes a folksong from Little Russian which says,

The bright sun, she is the mistress,
The bright moon, he is the master,
The bright stars, they are the children.

In the next song which I have to offer we meet the sun in the familiar character of the seeker after that which is lost, the ἥλιος πανόπτης of Aeschylus³ and Homer,

ὃς πάντ' ἐφορᾷς καὶ πάντ' ἐπακούεις.⁴

¹ In Rhesa, No. 78, Nesselmann, No. 1, the orphans which the sun guards beyond the sea and the mountains are very likely the stars, and this agrees well with Heine's "Verwaisten Sternenkindern."

² *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, VII, 1875, p. 303.

³ Aeschylus, *Prom. Vinc.* 91,

τὸν πανόπτην κύκλον ἡλίου καλῶ.

⁴ Hom. *Il.* iii, 277.

Her attendants are the morning and the evening star who are busied in her service. The song runs as follows :¹—

Oh, at the yester even tide I lost my little lamb.
 Oh, who will help me go and seek my only little lamb?

I went and asked the morning star, the morning star replied,
 "I have to build the dear sun's fire at morrow's morning tide."

I went and asked the evening star, the evening star replied,
 "I have to make the dear sun's bed at every even tide."

I went and asked the waning moon, the waning moon replied,
 "I have been smitten with a sword, my sorry face I hide."

I went and asked the lovely sun, the dear sun gave reply,
 "Nine days I'll seek and on the tenth I'll not set in the sky."

The last line affords at least two difficulties: what is meant by the sun's seeking nine days, and what is meant by its not setting? We may be sure that nine is not to be taken exactly. As in the Icelandic Eddas so in Lithuanian folk-literature it occurs over and over again as the indefinite number. We say in English that a cat has nine lives; in Lithuanian a person in a very meditative mood says, "I have nine riddles like a Tom cat."² To an idly talkative person a Lithuanian says, "You can talk like nine dumb men."³ One riddle describes a cabbage as a little old woman with nine skins,⁴ another as a one-legged man with a hundred fine garments.⁵ A liar is called *devynlėžuvis*,⁶ nine tongued, and an apple a nine hearted one.⁷ Schleicher relates the story

¹ Rhesa, No. 81. Nesselmann, No. 3. Schleicher, p. 4.

² *Asz tūru devynės misles kãp kãtins.* Bezenberger, *Litauische Forschungen*, p. 50.

³ *Tu gali kalbėt kãp dèvynei nèbile.* *Ibid.*

⁴ *Mãža mãteriskèle su divynės kaĩlines. Kãpũsts.* Bezenberger, *Lit. Forsch.* p. 44. Compare the Lettish riddle for an onion, which he cites, p. 48, note: *Sa'rkans vèrsĩts, devĩnas ádas; kas tĩ dirãja tas gãu/chi ráudaja.* A red warp beam, nine skins; he who flays it weeps bitterly.

⁵ Schleicher, *Lit. Lesebuch*, p. 60. *Vẽnkojėlis žmogũs szimtà szũbu tur.*

⁶ Nesselmann, *Lit. Wörterbuch*.

⁷ Schleicher, *Lesebuch*, p. 62. *Suėdjau devynszirdĩ. Óbũls.*

of the nine brothers,¹ which partly because of its mythological contents he holds to be old, and in which the witch asks, "Are here nine windows, are here nine tables, are here nine jars, are here nine dishes, are here nine spoons?" In a recent collection of folktales by Jurkschat² is the story of nine brothers who were changed by a curse into nine ravens, but resumed their human form every ninth day. Their sister freed them from the curse by weaving nine shirts of nettles for nine years. Jurkschat thinks that this tale refers to the nine traditional tribes of the Lithuanians! Similar examples of the use of the number nine could be added indefinitely, but I think enough has been said to convince any one that the expression "*nine* days I'll seek" need have no astronomical significance. It is equivalent to saying "I will seek for days and days."

Nesselmann, conceiving the sense and metre of this line to be bad, emended it by changing "the tenth I will not set," to read "the tenth I will not desist."³ More recent editors have kept Rhesa's text,⁴ and I feel quite sure that they are right. I understand the line to refer to the summer solstice when the sun rises higher and higher in the heavens, and finally seems hardly to go out of sight at all. I have been much confirmed in this view by coming upon a corresponding idea for the winter solstice. In two songs in Leskien's collection⁵ the young girl who learns that her sweetheart is dead calls upon the god to know who will help her mourn. The bright sun replies, —

"I will help you mourn your lover ;
Nine mornings I will rise in mist,
The tenth I will not rise at all."

¹ *Lesebuch*, p. 144, and *Lituanica*, p. 36.

² *Litauische Märchen und Erzählungen im Galbraster Dialekt*. Heidelberg, 1898.

³ Rhesa, *O deszimtą ney nusileisiu*. Nesselmann, *O deszimtą ne leisiū*.

⁴ Schleicher, *Lesebuch*, p. 4. Wiedemann, *Handbuch der lit. Sprache*, p. 252.

⁵ *Litauische Volkslieder u. Märchen*, Part I, Nos. 49 and 101. The same theme recurs also in Bezzenberger, *Lit. Forsch.*, p. 10, No. 14, but there the original figure is so far lost that the sun promises to shine brightly on the tenth day.

One needs only to have lived till Christmas among the hills and lakes of Central New York to appreciate the full force of this description of the winter solstice. It is equalled only by that other figure of the sun rising higher and higher over the earth to scan the wide horizon and find the missing lamb.

The next *dáina* celebrates the dawn. The gray clouds that line the east before the rising sun are likened to an oak tree which Perkúns shatters, so that its bright blood flecks the sky to its very summit. The scattered clouds besprinkled with the rising red of dawn are the scattered leaves of the oak, and in the same picture the fleecy clouds are the dress of the dawn which has to be washed and dried in the sky, which is now compared to a lake and now to a garden. The song runs as follows¹: —

The morning star held nuptial feast ;
Perkúns rode through the portalled east,
And smote the green oak down.

The oak tree's life blood spurted out,
It spattered all my clothes about,
And all my leafy crown.

The daughter of the sun in tears
Collected for three weary years
Her chaplet's withered leaves.

"Oh tell me where, my mother dear,
Shall I wash from my clothes the smear,
Shall wash the blood that cleaves."

"My daughter dear, thy clothing take
To where thou'lt find the little lake
To which nine rivers flow."

"Oh mother dear, where shall I find
A place to dry them in the wind, —
To dry my dripping clothes?"

¹ Rhesa, No. 62. Nesselmann, No. 4. Schleicher, p. 4.

"My daughter dear, thy garments clean
Thou'lt dry in yonder garden green
In which nine roses grow."

"Oh mother dear, pray tell me where
My lovely white robes I shall wear,
And where shall put them on."

"My daughter dear, thy garments white
Thou'lt wear upon that morning bright
On which nine suns shall shine."

The interpretation of this song is greatly helped by several close parallels in Lettish, which have been compared and discussed by Mannhardt in the *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*.¹ In Lettish the oak is a golden oak.² In another Lithuanian *daina*³ the sun plants a rose bush beyond the mountains by the sea, and like Jack on his beanstalk climbs upon its branches to the heavens. The conversation in the Lithuanian version is carried on apparently between the sun and her daughter, the dawn. In Lettish it is in one place⁴ the Virgin Mary whose woollen canopy is bespattered and who holds the dialogue with Perkúnas, in another place⁵ it is a youth who converses with the Virgin Mary about his brown coat. The lake *to* which nine rivers flow is in Lettish the lake *from* which nine rivers flow,⁶ or the brook with nine mouths.⁷ The clouds are to be washed in the heavens whence the rains pour. After the rain the sky is like a garden of roses, or, as the Lettish has it, an apple tree with nine branches.⁸ In Lettish the sky is further called a rolling board⁹ over which nine rollers pass, a chest with nine golden keys.¹⁰ On the bright sunny day the clouds will be fleecy white, having been washed, dried, and rolled in the laundry

¹ Vol. VII (1875), *Die lettischen Sonnenmythen*, pp. 73, 209, and 281.

² Mannhardt, p. 83, No. 75.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 83, No. 75.

³ Nesselmann, No. 7.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 82, No. 72.

⁴ Mannhardt, p. 82, No. 72.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 82, No. 72.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 83, No. 75.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 82, No. 72.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 83, No. 75.

of the heavens,—a homely figure taken directly from the daily life of the Baltic people.

We catch a glimpse of these sun myths in the act of disappearing from the Lithuanian and Lettish folksongs. Seventy-five years ago barely half a dozen were preserved in Lithuanian; fifty years ago hardly a single one was still alive among the people. But they were not simply forgotten and dropped; they were metamorphosed into a new guise. As upon the stage a lake and mountain become a drawing-room before our very eyes, so the folksongs have changed with the changing life and thought of the Lithuanian people. To understand how this is possible we must bear in mind how the folksongs originate and are transmitted. Of course they are never written down; in fact, they are never even recited, but always sung. Wherever a company of young people is gathered, there the national love of song is given voice. Every Lithuanian carries in his head a greater or less mass of lyric material in more or less fixed form. The variability of this material has often been remarked by those who have made collections. "It frequently happens" (I am quoting Professor Leskien¹) "that one hears the same material from the same persons in different form on different days; now with different introductions, now with more, now with fewer stanzas, now with individual words changed. Far greater variations are of course found in different persons and different localities. I do not believe there is a single *daina* of which the text is fixed. There are various reasons for this variability. In the first place the singer cares nothing for the literal faithfulness of the tradition, in the second place in such lyric popular poetry there is a mass of verses and stanzas of so little individual character that, everywhere floating in the air, they are everywhere applicable, suit any subject, or may be omitted from any. Further, there is a tendency to fuse several songs into one."

We can also observe other tendencies in the folksongs. In the earlier ones both Nesselmann² and Kurschat³ remark

¹ *Litauische Volkslieder*, p. 4. ² *Lit. Volkslieder*, p. xiii. ³ *Lit. Gram.* §. 1655.

the absence of all reference to forms of the Christian church ; in Leskien's collection we frequently meet with church services and ceremonies.¹ The old songs are true to the national life and customs, and avoid new words and new ideas ; the late collections are full of the new-fangled German innovations, — Kutscher,² and Schuster,³ and Schneider,⁴ and Edelmänn,⁵ and Berlin,⁶ and what not. The vast majority of songs are erotic. The same characters and the same phrases recur over and over again. The bridegroom booted and spurred rides up on his stately steed. The bride awaits with a ring of gold on her finger and a wreath of rue on her head.

But perhaps the most remarkable feature is the way in which common objects are idealized. When the common word for horse, *arkl̥s*, is never used, but always the older inherited *žirgas*, the *ſi'rgs* of Lettish, we can understand it as a reminiscence of antiquity. But the horse, which is always a bay, has hoofs and bridle of gold ; golden are his rider's spurs, silken the saddle. Or if he comes in a boat, the sails and ropes are of silk, and this among a people living in the meanest hovels, in the greatest simplicity and poverty. It is to be noted that the frequently recurring use of gold, silver, silk, and diamond in the *dáinos* is really restricted to certain stock phrases, and is rare in objects usually made of these materials. If we turn to the songs of sun myths, especially the Lettish, we shall see that these same phrases are used, and here with more propriety.⁷ The daughters of the sun wear golden rings. The sons of the god ride on the steeds of heaven appointed with gold and silver and silk, where the gold and silver sunlight tinges their hoofs and

¹ See Nos. 3, 10, 24, 40, 77, 80, 82, 87, 107, 108, 133.

² Leskien, No. 62.

³ *Ibid.*, No. 65.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Nos. 65, 83.

⁵ *Ibid.*, No. 23.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Nos. 15, 70, 106, 140.

⁷ The following are a few sample phrases taken from Mannhardt's collection : a hundred *bay* horses of the sun, No. 44 ; the *spurs* and *ring* of the son of the god, No. 36 ; the *golden bridle* of the sun's horses, No. 20 ; the *golden* horses of the sun, Nos. 18, 19 ; the sun dances in *silver* shoes, No. 22 ; the sun's *silk* dress, No. 16 ; the sun gives *gold rings* to the willow, No. 13, and to the birch for her tender white fingers, No. 15 ; the *ring* of the daughter of the sun, Nos. 59, 60.

trappings, while their bay color reflects the hues of the bright or twilight sky. Gold is the color of the sun, and hence properly the steeds of the sun are shod and caparisoned with gold, and their divine riders wear golden spurs.

Thus from the mythological songs these common phrases arose. Then as the old mythology faded from the minds of the people the songs gradually changed their complexion while the phrases stayed. The son of the god with golden spurs, riding through the heavens on his bay steed with golden shoes, became the Lithuanian lover riding to visit his sweetheart. The gods were brought down to earth with a vengeance, and so recklessly that they did not consider the impropriety of golden spurs and hoofs among the poverty-stricken hovels along the banks of the Niemen.

My space will hardly permit me to do more than hint at the point I would like to prove. The evidence lies very much on the surface. To illustrate the metamorphosis of the sun myth into a love song, let me cite, in closing, one *daina*¹ in which the change is not yet fully carried out, and in which we can see the stage setting still moving. The song is in two distinct parts. The first part contains plainly mythological references, the second is in a different metre and is purely erotic. There is a variant to the opening stanza, which adds still more mythology to the commonly published version. The original mythological basis of the song may be made out with only a mild use of the imagination. The outline of it is something as follows: The sons and daughters of the god—that is, the stars and planets—are dancing under the sacred maple by the sacred spring—that is, the liquid depths of heaven. The daughters of the god bathe their faces in the crystal waters and in so doing lose their golden rings, which the sons of the god come and fish up for them with silken nets. The sons of the god come riding up on bay steeds with golden shoes. This I conceive was the subject of the original mythological song. See how it has been moulded over in modern hands.

¹ *Rhesa*, No. 48. *Nesselmann*, No. 5. *Schleicher*, p. 12.

Under the maple the fountain,
There the sons of the god
Come to dance in the moonlight
With the dear daughters of god.

Variant.

Under the maple the fountain
Flowing with waters pure,
Where come the god's dear daughters
Early to bathe their face.

Down to the fount of the maple
Went I to bathe my face ;
While I was washing my face white
Fell from my finger my ring.

Will the dear sons of the god come
Bringing their nets of silk ?
Will they fish up my ringlet
Out of the waters deep ?

Soon a young swain came riding
Proud on a prancing bay ;
Oh, but the bay steed was wearing
Shoes of the purest gold.

"Come hither, my maid, come hither," he said,
"We will chat for a while,
We will dream a fond dream, where deepest the stream,
Where fondest love's smile."

"I cannot, my lad, though I would be glad ;
My mother is old,
And I should be late ; if I dared to wait,
My mother would scold."

“Then tell her, my maid, then tell her,” he said,
“That you had to wait;
For two ducks on the wing came and troubled the spring,
And so you were late.”

“’Tis not true, my maid,” the old mother said,
“By the maple boughs green
With a lad you did smile, and chatted the while
Love’s nonsense, I ween.”